

Ridley Park, PA – Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) and Congressman Rob Andrews (NJ- 01) today held a press conference to speak on the FAA’s airspace redesign plan, which Sestak has labeled reckless, unsafe and arrogant. Joined by members of the National Air Traffic Controllers Agency (NATCA), Sestak specifically addressed recent comments made by Jim Peters of the FAA, which were issued in response to NATCA’s safety concerns and which appeared in the February 21 edition of the Delaware County Daily Times.

— Congressman Sestak said that these comments are yet another glaring example of the FAA’s blatant disregard for public safety, stating that they have repeatedly ignored warnings about their plan from the Government Accountability Office, NASA and the National Transportation Safety Board. He noted that Calvin Scoville, Inspector General of the Department of Transportation who expressed concern about the 12 percent increase in runway incursions from 2006 to 2007.

Sestak cited examples of this disregard in safety and other areas, ranging from a Department of Transportation Official’s remark that “we hope they won’t let a small thing like a slight change in noise levels for a small number of residents affect” the plan to Acting FAA Administrator Robert Sturgell’s—whose confirmation is held up in the Senate due in large part to the flawed airspace redesign—comment with regard to Newark that it was not unusual for pilots “to get a departure heading after take off.” Yet departure headings at that airport are always given before takeoff.

Congressman Sestak also criticized recent remarks by the FAA’s Jim Peters. Mr. Peters’ remarks came on the heels of last week’s press conference in which Sestak and NATCA officials discussed the issues of FAA’s bad management practices and lack of leadership as it pertains to aircraft safety and the safety of ground populations. Don Chapman, in his capacity as the PHL president of NATCA, offered NATCA’s concerns about the FAA’s implementation of airspace redesign at PHL. These concerns all had been shared with the FAA and had been disregarded.

NATCA was not expressing the view that the airspace redesign implementation has resulted in air travel being unsafe. It was expressing concern that dismissive management practices are ignoring serious problems and this narrows the margin of safety we require in our national air transportation system.

In response, Jim Peters of the FAA made several statements, some of which Congressman Sestak has called “abusive.” Those statements were:

“If any controller at the Philadelphia Airport believes that these procedures are unsafe, they should look for work elsewhere.”

“If they don’t like working for FAA, they should reconsider their line of work.”

“The recent remarks attributed to Jim Peters demonstrate once again that the FAA is a rogue agency,” said the Congressman. “The idea that professionals who have concerns about safety should ‘find another line of work’ is an outrage. Everywhere in our society—from the military to

hospitals to mines to food processing facilities—responsible organizations emphasize safety first and reward professional employees who identify safety deficiencies.”

In addition to safety claims related to PHL, the NATCA president at the Newark, N.J., airport has also raised significant safety concerns about the airspace redesign implementation at that airport. Congressman Sestak recently learned that the FAA has threatened disciplinary actions against both NATCA representatives for speaking out about NATCA safety concerns.

The Congressman added that the FAA’s abusive comments and steps to squash legitimate employee safety concerns through these types of coercion are outrageous and contrary to the public interest.

Congressman Sestak has leveled much criticism against the FAA’s airspace redesign plan, which raises a number of problems including safety of those on the ground and in the air, noise, aircraft emissions, and the lack of an adequate, comprehensive plan to address our national air transportation needs.

“What I have observed in more than a year of close study is that the FAA has for 10 years been involved in developing, at great taxpayer expense, a flawed airspace redesign project that is insufficiently safe, environmentally unsound and operationally inefficient. It must be fixed,” said Congressman Sestak.

In addition to Rep. Andrews, Sestak was also joined at the conference by Don Chapman (President, NATCA, Philadelphia International Tower/TRACON), Pat Forrey (President, NATCA), and Paul Rinaldi (Executive Vice President, NATCA).

Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of “Deep Blue,” the Navy’s anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the “Global War on Terrorism.” He served as President Clinton’s Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the Congress.

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